



New York State Council Of Churches

Testimony Submitted to Environmental Conservation and Energy Budget Hearing

January 28, 2025

The New York State Council of Churches is comprised of over 7,500 congregations in nine Protestant denominations across the state. The members of those congregations, as well as people of many other faith traditions, share the conviction that we are called to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. That means taking concrete, practical steps to care for God's creation and to work for the well-being of our neighbors, especially those who are poor and most vulnerable.

Budgets are moral documents. They determine how we will allocate resources and how we will order our life together. They reveal priorities and values; they are an important way that we as a society care for one another, especially for the vulnerable. That is why the church takes them so seriously.

As people of faith we are grateful that we can be part of the public dialogue about how as a society we can promote the common good; address the needs of the most vulnerable among us; how we assure and advance justice; how we tell and adhere to the truth; and how we care for and help restore God's creation.

The climate crisis is of particular concern because of its extreme urgency and profound, and possibly irreversible, effects. In order to avert the worst impacts of climate change and preserve a livable planet, global warming needs to be limited as much as possible. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has determined that we have until 2030 to dramatically reduce fossil fuel consumption if we are to avoid a climate catastrophe. According to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, all global modelled pathways that limit warming to 1.5°C "involve rapid and deep and, in most cases, immediate greenhouse gas emissions reductions in all sectors this decade... Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a livable future" (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "Sixth Assessment Report, Working Group II: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Overarching and Frequently Asked Questions and Answers," June 2023).

Failing to keep the long-term global average surface temperature increase well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels will lead to increasingly frequent and dangerous extreme weather events including heat waves, droughts, wildfires, and heavy precipitation and flooding. Exceeding 1.5°C could also trigger multiple climate tipping points — such as breakdowns of major ocean circulation systems, abrupt thawing of boreal permafrost, and collapse of tropical coral reef systems — with abrupt, irreversible, and dangerous impacts for humanity.

The climate crisis therefore is not only an environmental and economic issue; it is also a profoundly moral issue. It is an issue of economic, racial and generational justice. The poor, the marginalized, communities of color, and coming generations will suffer the gravest effects of climate chaos. The World Council of Churches has spoken of “the urgent concerns of churches around the world in relation to climate change and its adverse effects on the whole of creation, especially on vulnerable poor and indigenous communities, ... and the moral imperative of fossil fuel divestment and of investing in a low-carbon path to realizing economic, social and ecological wellbeing and sustainability of the whole creation.” (The World Council of Churches executive committee, meeting in Nanjing, China, in November 2016.)

In order to help us all work together to avert the worst effects of the climate crisis and put us on a pathway toward a livable future we urge the Assembly and Senate to:

Include Cap-Trade-and-Invest revenue in the budget this year.

While Governor Hochul’s proposed budget includes \$1 billion of climate funding for a “Sustainable Future Program,” we note that the state would have five years to spend that money, an average of \$200 million a year, which is less than a tenth of the \$3 billion that Cap and Invest was supposed to raise each year. Further delaying implementing the state’s Cap-Trade-and-Invest program is unnecessary and unwise. The longer we delay the more difficult it becomes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the more people will suffer. We urge the legislature to push for a version of cap and invest with strong regulations that cap harmful greenhouse gas emissions and invest in programs to combat climate change while investing in disadvantaged communities.

Pass the NY Heat Act (A4592 / S2016: 2024 bill numbers)

Fossil fuels burned in buildings for heating, hot water, and cooking account for approximately one-third of greenhouse gas emissions in New York State. Heating and cooking with fossil fuels like natural gas also negatively impact indoor air quality, contributing to cases of asthma and heart disease. By amending the Public Service Law this bill mandates that Public Service Commission (PSC) make its regulation of electric and gas service in our homes and businesses consistent with the CLCPA. It will help New Yorkers transition to safer, less polluting and more

sustainable heating systems. It would also ensure that upgrades benefit lower and middle income families first by capping energy bills at 6% of income.

Enact the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (A1749 / S1464)

An average of 6.8 million tons of packaging waste is produced each year in New York State, constituting 40% of the total waste stream. Most of this packaging is sent to landfills, burned in incinerators, or winds up polluting our streets, parks, and beaches. Unlike aluminum, paper, and glass which are recycled more successfully, only about 5% of U.S. plastic waste properly recycled. Moreover, most plastics are only recycled once or twice before being disposed of in landfills or incinerators. Much of today's recycling is merely postponing final disposal, not preventing waste. And because single-use plastic is produced from fossil fuels, extracting and creating these plastics emits vast amounts of greenhouse gases. Today, about 4-8% of annual global oil consumption is associated with plastics, according to the World Economic Forum. If this reliance on plastics persists, plastics will account for 20% of oil consumption by 2050. Some [98 per cent of single-use plastic produced](#) today is made of petrochemicals – components derived from oil and gas. The extraction and transport of those fossil fuels, and the manufacturing and disposal of plastics, all create carbon emissions that are responsible for global warming.

The only way to curb these carbon emissions and mitigate plastic pollution is to significantly reduce the manufacture and use of plastics.

The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act would require companies to:

- Reduce their packaging by 30% in 12 years.
- Make the remaining packaging truly reusable or recyclable.
- Ban the most toxic chemicals currently used in packaging.
- Pay to clean up their packaging waste by reimbursing municipalities and taxpayers for the collection and processing of those materials.
- Prohibit incineration and so-called "chemical recycling" from counting as recycling.

Stop Climate Polluter Handout Act (A7949 / S3389: 2024 numbers)

New York exempts the fossil fuel industry from approximately \$1.6 billion of Sales & Use Tax and Petroleum Business Tax every year. Repealing some of these fossil fuel industry tax subsidies will help ease pressure on the budget and send a clear signal that the state will no longer subsidize industries and practices that are continuing to cause harm by contributing to the climate crisis. The Stop Climate Polluter Handouts Act amends the tax code to remove over \$330 million in tax handouts to the fossil fuel industry, and focuses on highest polluting fuels like high-emission commercial airline fuel and low-grade shipping "bunker" fuel. The Act preserves tax breaks that

benefit the public, so the average lower and middle income New Yorker will not be significantly impacted, and job losses are not expected. In order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we must stop relying on fossil fuels; a key step is to stop subsidizing them.

GAP Fund (A2101)

[The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act](#) (CLCPA) enacted in 2019, mandates that the state achieve 70% renewable generation by 2030 and 100% zero emissions by 2040. According to the Climate Action Council's [Scoping Plan](#), the buildings sector is the largest source of statewide emissions at 32%. NYSERDA estimates that the state must electrify 250,000 buildings per year to reach our goals. A major obstacle to building electrification is the need for retrofits for outdated or structurally unsound buildings. Many buildings require upgrades before electrification is possible. These upgrades are expensive and burdensome for low to moderate income residents. The GAP Fund establishes a green affordable pre-electrification (GAP) program to fund and provide technical assistance for homes and buildings in need of a wide-range of currently unfunded retrofits that are necessary for healthy buildings and achievement of New York's climate mandates.

The Renewable Capitol Act (S2689/A5633: 2024 numbers)

The Renewable Capitol Act mandates the conversion of the Capitol and Empire State Plaza to renewable energy. The Act requires the office of general services, in consultation with the power authority of the State of New York, to ensure that within three years all operations that power, heat or cool the Empire State Plaza complex shall entirely use renewable energy systems. Converting the state Capitol to 100% clean renewable energy is a critical environmental and racial justice issue. The communities of Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill have suffered for decades as a result of pollution caused by burning fuels (at various times coal, oil, gas, and garbage) used to power the Capitol Complex. We urge the legislature to include the Renewable Capitol Act in the budget and to adhere to the three-year timeline for converting the Empire State Plaza complex to renewable energy systems.

The urgency of the climate crisis demands that we act now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition as rapidly as possible to renewable energy systems. We cannot afford further delay. With the federal government retreating from its responsibility in addressing the crisis, it is imperative that New York State take bold and decisive action now.

Sincerely,

Rev. John D. Paarlberg, NY State Council of Churches Executive Committee
12 Bacon Lane, Loudonville, NY 12211
518-462-6040 jpaarlberg@gmail.com